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## Help KIPP serve more students in Atlanta

By Barry Berlin

In an era when our economic future and competitiveness are increasingly dependent on having a highly skilled workforce, the importance of education and college preparedness has never been more urgent. While the unemployment rate for college-educated people is around 4.5 percent, the rate for non-college-educated workers is at least triple that level, and for folks without a high school diploma, the rate hovers around 20 percent. Without the housing boom's abundance of construction jobs, a good education is more important than ever in obtaining meaningful work.

The recent news surrounding public schools in Atlanta is a setback, but there is still much reason to hope. Metro Atlanta is fortunate to have schools that are successfully preparing students to achieve, not only in college, but in life. I would like to highlight one particular program that is doing excellent work: KIPP Metro Atlanta, a network of five public charter schools educating 1,200 students from underserved Atlanta communities.

The Kendeda Fund recently made a significant philanthropic investment in KIPP Metro Atlanta with two end goals in mind: 1) to help a successful organization expand to serve more students in Atlanta, and 2) to demonstrate what's possible for students from less-than-ideal circumstances.

Leveraging KIPP's unique ideas and approaches throughout our public schools could be a huge boon to our city, economically and otherwise. According to a 2009 report by the organization CEOs for Cities, Atlanta's aggregate income would rise by nearly \$400 million if the college graduation rate of its residents increased by just 1 percent.

KIPP Metro Atlanta is part of KIPP (the Knowledge is Power Program), a national network of college-preparatory public charter schools. It operates four middle schools and one brand-new high

school, with an elementary school set to open in 2012; plans include expansion to eight schools serving approximately 3,300 students by 2016. KIPP Metro Atlanta schools excel at providing a high-quality college-prep education to students from disadvantaged backgrounds — and proving what is possible. Students aren't hand-picked, and open enrollment has led to a school population that is about 95 percent African-American, with more than 70 percent eligible for free or reduced-priced meals.

KIPP's success is built on a shared set of expectations and commitment among parents, students and teachers. Students at KIPP schools typically attend school each day from 7:30 a.m. until 5 p.m., on alternating Saturdays and three weeks in the summer. Instructors work 24/7 to help their young scholars succeed.

All this hard work has paid handsome dividends. In 2010, the Georgia Public Policy Foundation ranked KIPP Metro Atlanta's two flagship schools, KIPP WAYS Academy and KIPP South Fulton Academy, as Atlanta's two highest-performing non-selective middle schools serving a student body that is primarily from low-income families. Importantly, these schools' first college-bound graduating classes, whose students completed eighth grade at the KIPP schools, had a high school graduation rate of 96 percent, and a college matriculation rate of 85 percent — far above average for intown Atlanta schools.

KIPP Metro Atlanta recently launched a \$10 million capital campaign to build its first elementary school in Atlanta, and the Kendeda Fund is proud to announce a \$5 million dollar-for-dollar challenge grant to help with that cause. Additionally, the Fund will provide \$5 million in operating funding over the next several years to ensure the successful execution of KIPP's growth plan, and a \$1 million challenge grant to launch a scholarship endowment.

There is no better way to significantly impact our community than through education, and KIPP has proven an exceptional investment. I urge you to consider joining the challenge to ensure more students in our city have the opportunity to attend KIPP Metro Atlanta schools, and become strong contributors to society at large.